

Opening Plenary, 2023 World Conference against A and H Bombs - Nagasaki
August 7, 2023

Yurii Sheliashenko

Executive secretary, Ukrainian Pacifist Movement

Board member, European Bureau for Conscientious Objection (Brussels, Belgium)

Member of the Board of Directors, World BEYOND War (Charlottesville, VA, United States)

Member of the Council, International Peace Bureau (Berlin, Germany)

Dear friends, greetings from Kyiv!

78 years after the tragic atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the Doomsday Clock came as close as 90 seconds to midnight. Pity that the world learned nothing.

Ukraine certainly learned nothing, because we are still nostalgic about the Soviet nukes which Ukraine gave up in early days of independence; and we compensate this nostalgia, allying with NATO, where American nukes during the Cold War were targeted on Ukrainian cities: Kyiv, Kharkiv, Odesa, Dnipropetrovsk and Lviv.

Russian invaders already attacked these and other cities with rockets and drones. When Kyiv was under bombardment, I had to hide in a shelter, but I never wish Russians to experience what I survived.

During the war, from 2014, tens of thousands were killed, hundreds of thousands were wounded and crippled, millions were forced to flee, their homes and cities were destroyed. Again, I don't wish anybody on the Russian side to experience that; and I am disgusted that not only the Russian army but Ukrainian army too committed war crimes during this war.

When the media show how Russian rockets ruined an apartment building or burned a bus but not show how Ukrainian rockets cause similar atrocity, such half-truth is sickening, and it is a clear attempt to whitewash criminal character of any war effort, aggressive or even defensive.

Civilians in Ukraine are victims of war crimes and human rights violations of both armies, Russian and Ukrainian. Especially painful is arbitrary detention of people unwilling to fight, repressions for draft evasion, travel ban for all men and official

denial of human right to conscientious objection to military service contrary to Article 18 of International Covenant for Civil and Political Rights and other international human rights obligations of Ukraine.

No war could be just, because any war is mass killing out of failure to resist aggression nonviolently and negotiate reconciliation.

Poisoning of Ukrainian land by cluster munitions and weapons with depleted uranium, battles and terrifying provocations around Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant are already bad signs.

But Russian nukes in Belarus; NATO's nuclear sharing which might include Poland; supply of nuclear-capable F-16 fighter jets to Ukraine, a lot of public reminders about nuclear might of Russia and NATO, provocative calls to disregard it as a bluff, WMD arms race, -- all these nuclear threats and threatening behavior are reckless and dangerously stupid.

If Russia loses conventional war, Putin could use nuclear weapons; and if Ukraine loses the war NATO could do it too. If the war of attrition will grind for decades, as both sides plan, all these years we will live under threat of nuclear apocalypse -- unless belligerent stupidity will be abandoned in favor of long-awaited ceasefire and peace talks.

It is beyond imagination what horrendous killing and destruction could unleash if the war in Ukraine happens to turn nuclear. Many popular leaders are willing to take this risk, misguided by war profiteers of the military industrial complex. It is the utter absurdity of violent geopolitical ambitions.

Washington and Kyiv, Beijing and Moscow want big changes in the world resulted of this war, talking about democracy and multilateralism, but in fact wanting more power.

No matter what good things you say you defend when it is an attempt to defend the indefensible, the mass killing, the war.

When you promise miracles which could be achieved by hatred, by bloodshed, by revenge and victory, you deceive yourself and others. You squander best hopes when promising the violence could deliver. It can't. No big changes by violence could be good.

I wish the belligerent calls to defeat Ukraine and to defeat Russia will be universally received with appropriate coldness and skepticism.

The United States dropped these bombs on Japan to win World War Two. I wish the word "victory" will be repulsive for all people, I wish when people hear this word they will think about the Atomic Bomb Dome. I refuse to believe in any victory except for win-win scenarios, when people talk instead of killing. Only commitment to nonviolence could change the world for better, could give hope that in the world where everybody refuses to kill there will be no wars.

When Hibakusha convinced the international community to sign the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, this was a big change for good achieved without violence, a bright example for all reformers. Pity that Russia, China and NATO members openly despise TPNW, but, you know, legal documents are similar to these paper cranes of Sadako: we need to make thousands of them and then they will have effect, at least inspiring hope that big changes for the better are possible.

The day will come when people everywhere will demand peace by peaceful means, disarmament and nonviolent governance. The loud voices and peaceful crowds on streets will awake conscience of people and governments. So-called great powers will give up their nuclear stockpiles and dumb ambitions to rule the world threatening to burn all life on the planet; and the only great powers which will remain and rule our big family of humankind on the common land, our mother planet Earth, will be the truth in every mind and love in every heart.

Don't give up this hope for the world without wars and without nuclear weapons!

Help all those who resist wars and militarism, all those who refuse to kill, all those who refuse to serve in armies, all those who call to cease fire and scrap all weapons!

Together, we could make the dream come true and build a world where the criminal atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki will never be repeated.